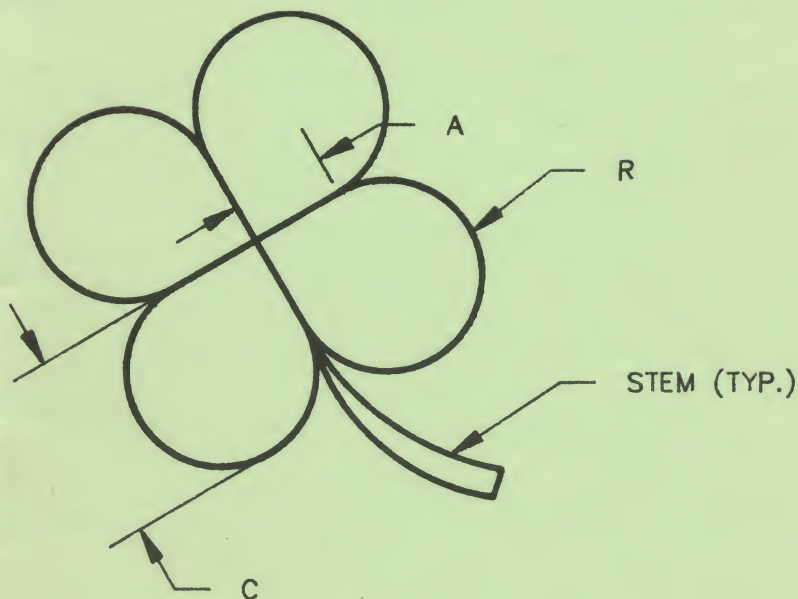


STATUS

N E W S L E T T E R

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 3

MARCH 1987



	A	R	C
FORTUNATE	.25	.30	.55
OPPORTUNE	.40	.45	.85
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Editor's File

Hail to the Chiefs

If you're one of those normal people who read a magazine from front to back, then you probably haven't noticed that the President's Column is being penned by someone new. That's right, we had our Officer's Elections this month, and Buck Maddrey was elected President! Good Luck, Buck.

Last month was February 87 not 86...

At this point I'd like to take the opportunity to thank our out going President, Gene Rodriguez. He's been President of this club for as long as most of us can remember, and his devotion and leadership will be felt in this club for years to come. I think that a lot of the character of this club can be attributed to his administration.

Thanks, Dad.

The Shotgun Approach

While reading the latest issue of PC Magazine (of all things) I came across an interesting theory put forth by columnist John C. Dvorak,

regarding the announcement of the ATARI PC. Mr. Dvorak contends that the Winter CES announcement was an attempt at "dry testing", a technique whereby the manufacturer of a proposed product releases prototypes with several different combinations of price and features, and sits back and waits for reactions from the market and industry. Dvorak relates his CES experiences, and says that he heard no less than five different stories regarding the new machine, its release date, and its final price. Kind of makes you wonder...

The months just keep on clicking by... before you know it, it'll be time for the STATUS picnic! This is issue comes to you courtesy: Jeff Falkenhan, Buck Maddrey, Rich Thieman, Jim Parker and the nimble little fingers of yours truly...

Errata...

Apologies to Jim Parker, for not crediting him with keying in the article concerning disk care, thanks Jim. And for those of you who really pay attention, thanks for pointing out to me that last month was February 87 not 86. Those of you with back issues can go back and check (just to make sure)...



Former STATUS President Gene Rodriguez presents Kent Irwin, owner of Interface, with a plaque in appreciation of his service and dedication to the local ATARI community. Thanks, Kent!



(Left to Right) Gene Rodriguez III, Dick Litchfield, Buck Maddrey, Joe Hootman, Kent Irwin, Chuck Sargent, Ron Johnson, Gene Rodriguez (Kneeling) Stan Harrison.

ST Software Review

By Buck Maddrey

SHANGHAI

Activision Inc.

Mountain View, Ca. 94043

\$44.95

A little History

During the latter part of the 19th century, travelers to China were fascinated by a game played in many different provinces. The transliterated names were ma cheuk, ma Chiang, ma chiao and mo tsiah. During the early 1900s, an American businessman, Joseph Babcock, made a study of the Chinese rules, codified them, devised English terms and finally christened the game Mah Jongg. In 1920 he began to import Chinese Mah Jongg sets to the United States. The game became a fad in proportions never before achieved by ANY game. Some historians date Mah Jongg as far back as the time of Confucius or about 25 centuries ago, but historical evidence can carry it back only a few hundred years. The original game was played with brightly decorated cards by sailors and fishermen as a diversion from the monotony of long sea voyages. The cards then gave way to bone and ivory tiles, which were less likely to be blown off the decks. Mah Jongg is essentially Rummy,

played with the special 'tiles' rather than cards. This past Christmas I found a Mah Jongg set, complete with hand carved ivory tiles and a velvet lined case. The price tag read \$375.00.

~~~~~  
**Warning: Shanghai is  
habit forming and will  
probably be dangerous  
to your health...**  
~~~~~

A Retranslation

Well, now you don't have to pay \$375 to enjoy this game. The folks at Activision have released "Shanghai", a game based on the ancient Mah Jongg. There are 144 Shanghai tiles in all: 108 suit tiles, 12 Dragon tiles, 16 Winds, 4 Seasons, and 4 Flowers. Upon starting a game, the computer randomly lays out the tiles in the Dragon formation, making each Dragon unique. The Dragon is built by mixing the tiles and placing them in stacks from one to five tiles high. The stacks get taller toward the center of the Dragon. Your screen view of the Dragon is from the top, and you can only see the top tile in each stack, but you can tell how high a stack is by the color or thickness of its border.

The object of the game is to remove as many tiles as possible by matching pairs. Using the mouse, point and click on the first tile, this highlights it, then point and double click on a matching tile and the pair are removed. The tiles can only be removed if they are "Free". Any tile is considered "Free" if there's nothing on top of it and if it can slide out to the left or right, but if the tiles on both sides of it are stacked to the same height, then the tile is not "Free". There are four ways to play. You can choose Solitaire, Team Effort, Tournament, or Challenge.

Solitaire is the single player Shanghai. There is no time limit and you continue to remove matching tiles until they are gone or you run out of moves. The Team Effort is a variation of Solitaire except that any number of players cooperate to win the game and play rotates from one player to another with each player making one move at a time. In Challenge Shanghai, two players compete to see who can find the most moves in a game, both have a time limit to find a move and each players score is recorded. The time limits can be 60, 30, 20, or 10 seconds. Tournament Shanghai is my favorite. There is an optional time limit of 5, 10, 20

minutes. Choose the time limit and start a new game. Each player plays the same game and the winner is determined by who removed the most tiles in the allotted time. The top five players' names and scores are recorded for each tournament. During tournament play a clock at the bottom of the screen displays the time you have left and a beep sounds every minute to help you keep track of time.

Menus

There is an invaluable **Help Menu** bar across the top of the screen. By selecting an item from the Help Menu, you can **Back Up** a move (or several), **Start** the game over, **Show** all moves, and **Peek**. Peek only if your curiosity gets the best of you and you're willing to forfeit the game! There is also an on screen instruction guide as well as a strategy selection and a guide to the tiles and their names. A **Rules** menu is available on screen for the four game variations. You can control whether or not you want to be alerted to the fact that you have chosen a tile that is not "free" from the **Settings Menu**. This menu also allows you to chose Beeps/No Beeps. During timed games these warning beeps alert you as each minute expires, if you find these beeps annoying, turn 'em off!

There have been times when the random set up has placed two identical tiles on top of each other. Most often there is no way to remove them and the game will end with those two tiles remaining. This is very frustrating to say the least. It is very difficult to completely clear the board. Activision has included 15 or so saved games on the disk that CAN be played to completion. The ability to stop and save a game to be finished later is a nice feature, especially with this game.

Warning: Shanghai is habit forming and will probably be dangerous to your health! There is something about this game that just will not let you turn it off and walk away. After removing, say 100 of the 144 tiles, and there are no more moves, you are compelled to play just one more game, cause you know that you can do it NEXT TIME, and so, on and on you go. Finally you have to quit; either because you know you'll never make it the next day on two hours of sleep, or your eyes just won't focus any longer.

I tire very quickly of the typical maze and shoot'em up type games, but this is one that I'm always ready to play again. Fortunately, I have avoided the Asian flu this

winter but I sure have had a bad case of Shanghai fever. Activision, you've got a winner! My Rating: 5 Star plus.

Okimate Thermal Transfer Printers

By Rich Thieman

The Okimate 10 and 20 are thermal transfer printers manufactured by the Okidata Corporation. The Oki 20 lists for \$269 with the Plug'n Print Package for the Atari ST. The Oki 10 listed (at one time) for \$229 with the Plug'n Print Package for Atari 8 bits, the Oki 10 is only available with interfaces for the Atari XL or XE computers and (shudder) the Commodore 64. The Oki 10 is charcoal in color and the Oki 20 is off-white.

~~~~~  
**You'll have time for  
a cup of coffee...  
it takes about 20  
minutes to print a  
color picture!**  
~~~~~

Colorization

The Okimates are small quiet printers capable of producing beautiful color prints of Atari graphics. Color is produced by transferring a wax like pigment from the three color ribbon onto paper with a

thermal print head. The three primary colors of red, yellow, and blue are overlaid in three passes to create up to one hundred different colors in the case of the Okimate 20. The printers also print in black with a black ribbon or can use heat sensitive thermal paper without a ribbon. Their primary purpose is color though, and if you are not interested in making color prints you would probably be better off with a good dot matrix printer.

The color ribbons cost five to six dollars each and are good for about 10 color prints. The black ribbon cartridges cost about the same and will do around seventy five pages of text. This equates to around 10 cents per page with the cost of the paper included.

Color prints are produced using the color software provided with the Plug'n Print Package sold separately from the printer. The Plug'n Print Package includes an interface that plugs into the side of the printer, one color ribbon cartridge, one black ribbon cartridge, an SIO cable and a small supply of paper. The paper used must be a smooth textured paper. Using standard computer paper with a rag content or a rough texture will make the printouts look spotty

and washed out. It will only do color prints with XL or XE computers. I suspect it will be or has been discontinued since the Okimate 20 is now available with interfaces for almost every computer on the market except the Atari 8 bits.

The graphics to be printed must have been saved as a graphics file in one of the common formats such as Koala or the Atari Touch Tablet. The file is then loaded into the color print software and dumped to the printer. You'll have time for a cup of coffee or a Coke because it takes about 20 minutes to complete one color picture. I've found that a program utility called SNAPSHOT produces much better color than the Okimate software. SNAPSHOT lets you change colors before printing just by using a joystick and also will dump ComputerEyes graphics to the Oki 10. SNAPSHOT was written by Richard Q. Fox. For further information contact:

Joy Fox Productions
1364 Campbell Street
Orlando, FL 32806

I've never seen the program in local stores or even in any Atari mail order ads. The ANTIC program called RAMBRANDT will also drive the Oki 10 printer in color.

The Okimate 10 has a 9 pin print head with a unidirectional print speed of 60 characters per second and can print in 5, 8, 10 and 17 character pitches. It emulates the old Atari 1025 dot matrix printer in most applications except that it does have true below the line descenders. Like the Atari 1025, it does not underline or do sub/super scripts. It also has a nasty default page perforation skip feature that must be turned off with a software command since there are no DIP switches. The printer remembers the paper position when turned on and 66 lines down the page it does a one inch space automatically. Most word processors including ATARIWRITER do their own page formatting and it is real easy to forget to turn off the page skip feature. This leads to one inch gaps in the text when least expected or a double margin at the bottom or top of the page when used with a word processor that does it's own formatting.

Version 2.0

The Okimate 20 also is sold as a bare printer that must be used with a separate Plug'n Print Package. The Atari ST Plug'n Print Package has the same material as the Oki 10, although the interface

has six DIP switches which can be set to change things like slashed zero, end of page warning, page perforation skip, line spacing for color prints, 17 CPI to 10 CPI, and length of page. The interface must be removed from the printer to change the DIP switches. I highly recommend turning off all power before removing the interface or you may find that your printer has stopped printing when you try your new DIP switch settings. I can personally attest to this piece of advice.

The Okimate 20 has a 24 pin print head and does all the neat things like underlining, italics, super/sub scripts, and elite type styles. It has both a utility and NLQ mode with a speed of 80 Characters per second in utility mode. The NLQ mode works in one pass at a speed of 40 CPS... my only gripe here, is that it defaults to NLQ when turned on and does not have a DIP switch to change it. You must do it with a software command. The install printer option under the desk accessory does not change the print mode to utility or NLQ (this option doesn't work with my STAR SG 10 either).

The color dumps are much faster than the Oki 10 (less than 1/2 the time) but the really neat thing about the Oki

20 and the Atari ST is that when you have loaded the color dump program into memory you can run any program and dump any screen to the printer just by pressing the Alternate and Help keys together. The screen action is frozen for the 10 minutes or so that it takes to print the image. This means that anything shown on the screen can be dumped to the printer in color.

Tom Hudson has just uploaded an Oki 20 printer driver to CompuServe that works with DEGAS ELITE and the Atari ST interface. The printer driver included with the DEGAS ELITE program is for the IBM Okimate 20 interface. The colors are not as nice as those obtained with the software included in the Atari ST Plug'n Print Kit but the black and white driver will print in both horizontal and vertical by pressing the Alternate Key before selecting the "Print Pic" option from the DEGAS ELITE menu. The printer selection for the Okimate 20 in PRINTMASTER is also only for the IBM interface.

The Okimate 10 and 20 Thermal Transfer Printers are great choices for anyone desiring color in a low priced printer for the Atari Computers. They can be used

for all home printing requirements but supplies would get quite expensive if used for volume printing.

Atari Software For Young Children

By Jim Parker

Shortly after I purchased my Atari computer system approximately two years ago, I began seeing software for young children. I had my two year old daughter Adrian in mind. Her mother was in the process of teaching Adrian her alphabet, numbers, and reading children's books to her. I, wanting to get the most out of my new investment (my 130 XE) purchased "Early Games for Young Children" by Springboard Software.

I was immediately surprised and impressed. Adrian became very attracted to the computer and the game. She learned to turn on the power strip, load the program in the disc drive, turn the computer on while holding down the option key for a binary load. She learned to select the game she wanted to play, and play the games. She learned how to handle the disc properly, put it away in the disc file, and turn off the computer system.

At this age children can easily be underestimated. They are very curious and able to learn very quickly. The computer software teaches them many things, while making it fun to learn.

~~~~~  
**I was immediately surprised and impressed...**  
~~~~~

While playing "Early Games" your child will learn to identify shapes and letters, add and subtract numbers, draw creatively, say the alphabet and type his or her own name. The colorful games teach your child many computer basics and the picture menu makes it easy for children to select and play games without adult supervision.

Adrian is now four years old, and has continued to keep her interest in the computer. I didn't stop with "Early Games", I kept on buying children's software. Joe Hootman found some "Sesame Street" programs on sale and sold them to me some time back. Thank you Joe, these are two of the best children's software programs I have in my library. These programs, "Letter-Go-Round" and "Astro-Grover", by CBS Software are a must for your

young children. These programs have keyboard overlays that cover the keyboard made of plastic, with painted colorful characters and keys pertaining to the game. This eliminates the unnecessary keys, which would confuse your youngster. The music is very good and the graphics are excellent. This helps hold the child's interest. I also recommend "Big Bird's Special Delivery", "Ernie's Magic Shapes", and "Dr. Seuss Fix Up Mix Up Puzzler".

If I can be of any help to you on children's software, please don't hesitate to contact me. I can be contacted at the "STATUS" club meetings, or at home, 460-3815. If you are not a member, we extend an invitation for you to attend any of our clubs future meetings as our guest. I can assure you it's worth your time.

Dr. Download Takes a Drive

Many callers to the Dr. Download BBS are amazed by the sheer volume of d/l files. "Surely you must be running an ATR8000 with 8" drives!" they say.

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A more elegant way to construct a large data base is to acquire a Percom controller card. These magical PCBs enable Atari users to connect any 34-pin Shugart-compatible drive mechanism (Tandon 100-2, Teac, MPI, etc.) to their systems.

The term "Percom drive" is a misnomer: Percom did not make drives! They made controller cards, boxed them with power supplies and MPI drive mechanisms, & sold \$150 of hardware for \$450 (for a SSDD model RFD40) or for \$750 (for a DSDD model RFD44). The controller cards in these models were identical. The difference was that the model 44 drive mechanism had two heads, a feature that must have cost Percom an additional \$15.

The slim volume of documentation that accompanied these models mentioned that "Percom slave drives" could be connected to the 34-pin plug, and seemed to imply that these "slaves" were specialized hardware. The fact is, that any generic disk drive can be connected to an Atari computer using a Percom controller card.

Percom cards with model numbers RFD44, RFD40, and AT88-SPD feature the 1795 disk controller chip that is designed for SD, DD and DSDD operation. The cards have two

standard Atari serial ports, and a 34 pin parallel plug (RFD40, -44) or edge-card connector (AT88).

Naturally, our interest is in the 34-pin connector, through which any four Shugart-compatible drives can be wired in parallel. There is nothing special about the drive mechanism that comes in the box: it is connected in parallel also, and may be removed or replaced.

So, let's say you have an AT88 that came with a SSDD half-height MPI mechanism, and that you want to replace this mechanism with four Tandon 100-2 DSDD drives (giving you 1.5 Mb of storage for about \$600-not a bad deal). Pull out the MPI unit & sell it to someone you don't like (that particular model gives problems).

Use standard plugs, connectors & ribbon cable to wire the Tandons to the edge card connector on the AT88 controller card. The analog board of each drive features a jumper socket for selecting the drive number of that unit. Jumper each drive as 0, 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

The physical location the drives with respect to the card is unimportant, as is the type

of drive. SD and DD drives may be mixed & matched as desired. The new Percom ROM from Wordmark Systems, Garland, Texas, allows use of 8" drives as well! A true fanatic could thus connect four 8" DSDD units to make a 6 Mb data base!

Dr. Download uses four Mitsubishi 4853 drives. These units are 5", half-height, 96-TPI cuties that can write 80 tracks per side, storing 720K per Atari-formatted disk. At \$150 per drive, plus \$40 each for two switching power supplies, plus \$60 each for two dual enclosures, a 3Mb data base was created for less than \$700. All of this hardware was advertised in Computer Shopper (which also features excellent editorial content).

The DOS you use will make you or break you. Dr. Download uses MYDOS 3.013, a menu-driven DOS that looks comfortably like dear old Atari 2.0S, but is actually a much more powerful system that will allow you to run any combination of SS, DS, SD, DD, 5", 8", 40 track or 80 track units completely transparently. We use MYDOS to software-configure each drive for SD or DD, SS or DS, 40- or 80-track operation.

Prospective users should be aware that the nitty-gritty

details of exactly how things work with each type of drive depend on the ROM in the controller card. The Percom ROM went through many revisions, and no one version seems to do everything correctly for every type of drive mechanism.

For example: the RFD40 card that runs Dr. Download uses the 1.1 ROM, which reads and writes to 80-track drives, but will not format them! The AT88 card, which uses the 1.2 ROM, will read, write & format on 80 track drives, but has the annoying habit of forgetting the SD/DD settings for the upper 3 drives on booting. Needless to say, Dr. Download has an AT88 controller card operating off-line to format disks for the BBS, and has 100 formatted disks in storage against the time that the AT88 card dies.

Which brings up another important topic: the reliability of Percom service & support, and the longevity the controller cards. This may seem inappropriate since Percom no longer sells drive systems for the Atari. They do service the old drive systems, however, and if you are planning to build a BBS around an obsolete controller card you will want to know about your last line of defense.

The Percom drive system is an example of a terrific concept crippled by miserable engineering. Percom crammed the whole works into an enclosure that was too small and inadequately ventilated. The result often was that the card slowly fried over periods of extended use.

The controller card for a BBS must therefore be enclosed separately from the drives it services to keep it cool & comfortable. If it dies anyway, send it to the Percom hospital in Dallas for replacement, and keep replacing dud cards until you get one that works. When the card works, in a cool environment it will run indefinitely. The Dr. Download BBS controller card has been operating continuously since August 1984 without missing a beat. The Dr. Download backup controller card has been replaced four times in the same interval, so you just can't tell by looking.

The Percom hospital in Dallas is a strange place from which drives may be returned in a week, or in 10 weeks, depending on nothing that you can see. If you are in dire need of your card or drive, phone it in as a rush order and it will return within 5 days for a 10% surcharge (an extra \$5

on the \$55 charge for replacing a controller card, for example).

They will not sell you an extra card; they profess to know nothing whatever about anything discussed in this essay, and are likely to lie to you if you ask the innocent question, "Can I use any drive as a slave for a Percom, or do I need a Percom slave?".

So that's the story about Dr. Download's 3 Mb data base. Callers will find it crammed with 26 menus of the best public domain music, art, graphics demos, pinball games, fancy fonts, Jean Rowe BASIC music, programs for the 1020 plotter, telecom programs, and complete listings from ANTIC, ANALOG and COMPUTE! magazines.

Meanwhile, call Dr. Download 24 hours daily at 614-587-3774, 300 or 1200 baud. No password, no time limit... just huge phone bills.

GEM vs IBM Format in Designing ZOOMRACKS

By Jeff Falkenhan

This review is based on an examination of Zoomracks II, an upgrade of the original program and its improvements. This means that the program will be looked at in terms of

its upgrade from its original format, its use of an IBM keystroke approach and its competition.

~~~~~  
**This program feels  
like a program...  
ported over to the ST.**  
~~~~~

This program offers an interesting metaphor that is easy to follow. The keystroke combinations used to execute the metaphor are complicated in relation to the GEM system and how well it works in relation to the IBM use of function, control, and alternate keys. This means that the program will be seen as useful and helpful for the person who use IBM and likes that keystroke approach. For those who use the mouse, the idea becomes more complicated. You can use the mouse in Zoomracks, but the program does not use the GEM menus which are all visible. It uses the sequential menus that IBM uses, where one keystroke gets a person to another menu. A person can use the mouse in relation to the command line and on the screen to select items, or to toggle "on screen" selections.

I spent several hours learning the keystroke patterns of Zoomracks I, and found the

program difficult to learn in relation to the GEM programs that I was also using. DB Master allows fields to be created and moved easily. For me Zoomracks takes longer. I like the file card and rack metaphors, but I would like them better if they were combined with GEM. This program *feels* like a program written for the IBM machine and ported over to the ST.

The program includes both a function key template and a command chart to assist the user. It also has templates that can be used with the program to provide built-in examples of special applications to assist the new user. I would like to look at this overall issue of program design and then look at the specific workings of the upgrade and its special templates in another review. The overall design is easy to follow because of the pay card/rack metaphor. I found that using the mouse helped me get into the program more easily and to experiment with it, but the command key backers might like the command sheet and function key help strip.

The tutorial was complete and interactive. The help menus and the disk information also help the newcomer get into the program. I am still

impressed with the suitability of the program for a person who prefers keystrokes to a mouse. It is a line-oriented program in its word processing mode, which I am using right now. The Editing menu makes use of the backspace and deletes keys but the other commands are not easily remembered (except for Control-P=Paste).

As the program has become more powerful since its first version, the command structure appears to become more complicated. This command structure was workable considering that I had used the program for several hours in its first version. I found enough problems in using it then that I did not continue to use that version on a regular basis. I had some problems in redesigning Zoomracks, and in importing ASCII files not written in Zoomracks. My first impression is that this time the program is easier to use, but I will find out in using and creating templates on the new version.

One disconcerting thing I am already discovering is that the program leaves off letters of lines of text if I type a line that the program considers too long, so that I cannot tell if the spelling is my typing

mistake or how long I have typed the line. I would like to write more another time about the power features and special uses of this program.

President's Column

An Open Letter To ATARI

Since the buyout of ATARI from Warner Communications, the Tramiels have done a lot to change the faltering image ATARI had become associated with. You have introduced new products, improved on the old ones, and have made the company a money maker for a change.

You elected to cut spending on items such as free customer support telephone lines, major advertising, etc., and openly requested that User Groups be the backbone of the organization and help promote products and good will for you. You decided that the product line would best be marketed through major computer outlets rather than every Mom and Pop corner five and dime market. All of this is fine, and very evidently IT'S WORKING!

During one of the recent computer shows in which our User Group participated, I was approached by the Dept. Manager of a national chain store who told me "We just

can't get enough ATARI products to supply our stores". This store has subsequently dropped the ATARI line for that very reason.

Remember the announcement that you had signed an agreement with Toys-R-Us? They have not realized any benefits from that agreement to this date. In fact, there are fewer products now than there used to be. Why?


And just as recently as this afternoon, I was told by the owner of a local software store that he had placed an order for ten 8 bit drives and had only gotten two. I would chance to guess that of the 100% of the ST owners, approximately 80% of them would buy a second disk

drive... IF they could find one. There's hardly a dealer in this country who has any DS/DD drives available.

All of this brings me to the point. It's pretty sad to think that ATARI can't supply enough products to keep national chain store accounts, and even worse, the smaller distributors. Quit dangling the carrot on a string in front of our faces! Get the shelves and stockrooms of the few stores and distributors you have left supplied before they all pull out on you. After all, you asked for our support, and, we (the User Groups) have given it. You have gotten the reaction, NOW, how about some action?

Sincerely,
Buck Maddrey

• APRIL 1987

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EASTER													
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											LQ 20	NM 28	

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Submitted articles are preferred as disk text files, but will be gratefully accepted as hard copy (including handwriting) if you do not have a disk drive. If you have a modem, you can upload your articles to the Editor by calling the STATUS BBS at 468-1096. Articles may be submitted at any time, but will probably not make that month's Newsletter if submitted less than one week prior to the first meeting of the month.

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